



## News Release

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**Media Contact:**

Stephen McDonald

Office of Public Information

801-538-7099

### **Gold Medal Schools to Expand into All Elementary Schools** *Grant from IHC Will Help Utah Schools Fight Obesity*

(West Valley City, UT) – The Utah Department of Health (UDOH) and Intermountain Health Care (IHC) today announced they will partner over the next five years to expand the successful Gold Medal Schools (GMS) physical activity, nutrition, and tobacco prevention program into all Utah elementary schools, as well as junior high and middle schools. The cornerstone of the partnership is a \$1.5 million grant from IHC to the GMS program. The announcement comes at a crucial time when one in four students in grades kindergarten through eighth grade is at an unhealthy weight.

“As childhood obesity becomes more widespread right here in our own state, it’s essential to help schools give their students the opportunity to be healthy, active learners,” said Dr. David Sundwall, Executive Director, UDOH. “This partnership will ensure that we reach as many Utah children as we can, and instill in them the importance of a healthy relationship with physical activity and food for a lifetime of health.”

The announcement took place at Monroe Elementary, a school that has been active in GMS for the past three years and this year achieved Gold PLUS status, the highest attainable level in the program. This means that Monroe requires students to participate in at least 90 minutes of structured physical activity per week, offers a faculty wellness program, does not allow food to be used as a reward, and schedules recess before lunch, among other healthy changes.

Now in 30 of Utah’s 40 school districts, GMS is in its fourth year of encouraging Utah schools to help kids make healthy food choices, get more physical activity, and stay tobacco free. Schools work with mentors who help to write and implement policies, and

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to guide the schools to achieving Bronze, Silver, Gold, and Gold PLUS award levels. As schools reach each level, they receive a cash award to use for physical activity, nutrition, and anti-tobacco resources.

GMS has not only impacted the students at Monroe, but also a total of 179 Utah schools and almost 86,000 students since its inception in 2002. The cornerstone of GMS is the Gold Medal Mile, a route usually walked by students every day. This year alone, students walked a total of more than 200,000 miles, or almost six times to the moon and back.

“The Gold Medal School program is changing the conversation from one about overweight and obesity, to one about regular physical activity and good nutrition,” said Dr. Tamara Lewis, Medical Director of Community Health and Prevention for IHC. “IHC is looking forward to being part of that conversation.”

Utah First Lady Mary Kaye Huntsman was also on hand to present Monroe with its award for achieving Gold PLUS status. Her youth mentoring program, *Power in You*, helps high school students deal with a range of social problems, including eating disorders and substance abuse. “The Gold Medal School program is a nice complement to *Power in You*,” said Mrs. Huntsman. “Elementary school students who participate in Gold Medal Schools are learning healthy habits, as are high school students reached by *Power in You*. Expanding Gold Medal Schools into middle schools will help youth develop a healthy lifestyle that will carry them into adulthood.”

GMS will begin a pilot test for junior high and middle schools in 2007, and will implement the program in selected middle schools in 2008.

For more information about Gold Medal Schools, or to find out how your school can participate in the program, log onto [www.hearthighway.org/gms](http://www.hearthighway.org/gms) or contact Sarah Rigby, GMS Coordinator, at 801-538-9454 or [srigby@utah.gov](mailto:srigby@utah.gov).

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*The mission of the Utah Department of Health is to protect the public's health through preventing avoidable illness, injury, disability and premature death, assuring access to affordable, quality health care, and promoting healthy lifestyles.*